

## A Whistle In the Forest

Fear is an odd thing. It can twist something innocent and ordinary and if placed under the right circumstances, can make something truly terrifying. A classic example of this would be a rocking horse. It's really just a rocking horse but if you put it in a dark room, in a dark house and make it move on its own, it becomes demonic and frightening. This is because we are afraid of the unknown. It's not so much the rocking horse itself that is scary, as I said before, it's just a rocking horse, but we are scared of its unknown ability. I experienced this first hand one day when I was walking home from my friend's house. I was nine at the time.

It was a crisp winter evening and although it was only four in the afternoon, the sun had already begun leaving us on its constant journey throughout the sky. I had just departed from my good friend's house and was walking through a natural forest trail back to my house. It was getting chilly and my scarf was pulled up around my ears and so at first I didn't hear it. After a while, it became apparent though. There was a faint whistle resounding in the tall, dark trees. It sounded somewhat playful, like a children's playground chant. Naturally, being the curious young child that I was, I looked for what was making the sound. I searched in bushes, in trees, even in an old, hollowed-out tree trunk. Eventually I was able to pinpoint it to a small hole in the ground by a river bed. The trickling water and the cheerful whistling created a small chorus of peace. I looked down the hole in the ground, being sure to not get my jeans muddy in the damp soil. It was too dark to see anything. The hole itself was only about the size of my tiny fists. I poked inside the cavity a bit to see if there was something living inside it. I could feel the squelch of moist mud and that was about it. The whistling kept on singing while I did this, I hadn't interrupted it at all. The sky was beginning to get a bit darker so I pushed myself off the ground and trotted home with the river and the whistling ringing out behind me.

I came back the next day and found the hole near the river again. The whistling was still singing the same tune as before. Still curious, I snatched a stick from the riverbed and poked inside the

cavity, a bit deeper this time. Still nothing yielded. I squatted next to the hole, listening to the joyful whistle. After a while, I decided to join in, after all I knew the tune by now. I mixed my voice with the unknown for a few seconds until it simply stopped and left me alone in the forest. I sat in silence, frozen with both confusion and fear. Why had it stopped? Was I in danger? What had just happened? A rustle emanated from a nearby bush and I leapt up to my feet and sprinted out of the forest. The air around me seemed to have a sense of decay on my tongue, as if the dead leaves' stench was forcing its way down my throat. Holding my breath, I burst from the gnarled trees and snatched a lungful of fresh air. After that startling incident I didn't return to the forest for weeks.

Eventually curiosity got the better of me. I had remained determined not to step foot into that surreal yet ghastly woodland, but as I only had the mind of an inquisitive young child; I eventually gave into my wonderment. Weeks later I pedalled to the edge of the forest trail on my bike. It was a calm afternoon and the sun hid behind a mass of clouds. For a while I simply stood there, telling myself it was foolish to go back into the swarm of intimidating trees. It must have looked odd to a bystander, seeing a small nine year old boy in a Thomas the Tank Engine shirt clutching his bicycle's handlebars while staring up at some woodland. I must have stood there for about ten minutes just gazing into the wilderness considering what my next step would be. Eventually, with shaking feet I stepped into the forest and strode along the path until I came to the hole by the riverbed. I sat on my haunches and peered into the void. All I could see was darkness. I grinned to myself, wondering how I could be so ridiculous as to think something supernatural was hiding in there. What a silly prospect. A childish notion. I hauled myself up on a nearby branch and began to walk away with one last glance to the hole. Sitting in the hole, glancing back at me, was an eye.

I started and fell to my knees, scrabbling towards the hole. The eye stared at me as I peered back at it. The eye was beautiful and had a stunning blue iris. It was mesmerising. We watched each other closely for minutes both caught in each other's gaze. The

eye never blinked once, it just continued to stare at me. It was a magical moment, a child staring at an eye in a hole while the birds chirped and the leaves rustled around. Then the eye closed and left me staring into the black void. This made me upset for some reason, it made me feel alone. My face drooped and I began to sob. Then the whistling commenced. It was the same piercing cry that I had heard weeks ago, a mournful sound that made solemn memories push themselves into the front of my head. I leaned towards the hole so that I may see the glum eye and its beautiful blue iris once again. I placed my arm in front of me to keep myself upright when I leant over and it was then that the grey arm shot out from the cavity and clutched my wrist. I screamed, not even noticing that the surrounding trees had begun to sway menacingly, that the sky had grown dark and that the whistling had increased in volume and tension, now sounding reminiscent to the ravings of a madman. My ears were throbbing and the hand around my wrist refused to relent from its grasp. I stared wildly into the hole and saw the blue eye open again, along with other eyes, all different colours some red some green some purple some yellow some brown some black and the damned eyes smiled, yes smiled at me absolutely brimming with glee that another poor soul would be entrapped in there with them. The whole world flashed and spun in my vision as I screamed and screamed...

... And awoke in my own bed dripping with sweat. I jolted upright immediately and scanned the room nervously. I was safe. There was no more forest, no more river, no more hole and most importantly, no arm trying to drag me into the very depths of torturous hell that the black void had to offer. My mother raced in through the door upon hearing me awake and hugged me tightly, telling me that she had been so worried, that I was safe now and that the nightmares were over. I could only look at her in confusion. She read my face and understood that an explanation was in order. She told me that some backpackers walking the

nearby nature trail had heard me screaming and found me lying near the riverbed with my arm jammed deep into the hole, almost deeper than the hole physically allowed, and that I was unconscious but still screaming even while my body had shut down. They carried me from the forest and had brought me home after asking nearby neighbours whose child I was. I had been asleep for days, every now and then opening my eyes without seeing and I would scream. She didn't heed to my tale, passing it off as hysteria and the entire episode was blamed on a one-off seizure. Although that theory never explained the bruises on my wrist or the fact that I had heard the whistling weeks before I had my alleged 'seizure'. And most of all, it didn't elucidate that when the backpackers went back into the forest to further investigate, the hole in the ground had sealed up with rock, as if it had never been there in the first place.